

THE MIDLAND

A MAGAZINE OF THE MIDDLE WEST

VOL. XII

AUGUST, 1926

NO. 8

THE HALO

By HARRY GOODHUE HUSE

John Wenger should have stayed in his bed, as he would have done ordinarily, grumbling sleepily that she ought to have thought of it before they came upstairs, and had better put on her shoes and go down and shut it now, if she didn't want the coyotes killing off all her Plymouth Rocks.

But there was something unusual in the way his wife stood, before the window of their darkened room, gazing out into the bright Montana moonlight. He half-raised himself from the pillow to watch her, noting, with a faint warmth, her fine strong figure, showing solid and black and pleasantly unfamiliar, through her coarse muslin night-gown, against the rectangle of light. She stood there for several minutes, unaware that he was watching her. Then she turned back into the room. "The chicken-house door is open," she said. "I forgot to close it. I guess I better go down."

It took her a long time, it seemed to him, to draw on her shoes and slip her calico dress over the night-gown. It was almost as if she were having trouble making up her mind. She finished at last and went quietly down the stairs, stepping lightly so as not to awaken the children. He heard her moving about softly, in the kitchen. It

sounded as though she were fumbling for something, but he was not certain.

She must have hesitated again in the kitchen. For as he slid out of bed and edged to the window, she was nowhere in sight. The familiar barnyard lay quiet and empty, its clustered buildings standing out sharply against their own black shadows. Directly across from him some fifty yards away, was the white-washed chicken-house. He could see the door plainly. It was closed.

From below came the click of a latch, the squeak of the loose board in the stoop, and Freda Wenger stepped out into the moonlight. Her husband drew back from the window instinctively. It would be only natural for her now, intent though she must be upon her mission, to glance up toward the room where she had left him lying in bed, dropping off to sleep.

She came into view, an instant later, hurrying quickly across the yard. She passed the chicken-house without glancing at it, threaded her way between two empty hay-racks, and was swallowed in darkness by the yawning doors of the barn. Up there in the loft, on the hay, Lou Gooden, the homesteader, was sleeping.

John Wenger stood where he was, without moving, a squat, powerful man, thinking it all out. He had taken one quick step toward the bureau, with its loaded revolver. Then he had checked himself. Only in his imagination had he followed his wife across the chaff-littered floor of the barn, up the ladder, across the hay.

There had been purpose then, after all, back of Lou Gooden's nightly helpfulness with the dishes; back of his romps with the children and his enthusiastic praise of Doris, the third oldest — "Prettiest child, Mother Wenger, I've ever seen. She favors you," — back of the plea for sympathy he had made that very night by eating hardly anything for supper and admitting that he didn't "feel quite up to scratch. Got a little headache.

Don't amount to nothin'.' He had managed, nevertheless, to laugh and joke while they were doing the dishes. Freda had laughed with him. Toward the last, when the chatter had died down, John Wenger now remembered, he had looked up from the farm paper he was reading, under the bracket lamp over in the corner, and had seen Lou Gooden slumped down in a chair, his dish towel over one shoulder, holding his head in both hands. Freda had stopped sloshing skillets about in the dish-pan, had turned around, and was looking down at Lou with a curious expression. It reminded John Wenger of the way she often looked at the children — or the way she used to look at him, when they were first married. It had made him think, somehow, of the colored print of the Madonna, tacked on the wall of the front room, over the organ. Freda had stood there for a half-minute, looking down at Lou like that. Then she must have felt her husband's gaze upon her, for, looking up at him quickly, she had gone suddenly red and turned back to her work. Lou Gooden had gotten up shakily, a few minutes later, said goodnight, and gone out to the barn. He had been sleeping there for a couple of weeks and boarding with the Wengers while he built a shack on his homestead, a mile to the west of them.

John Wenger thought it all out, in his strong, unemotional way, standing there bare-legged before the open bed-room window. These things happened — were bound to happen. Women were weak like that — not to be trusted. A man could get around them if he tried. He should have remembered that, from his younger days, if he hadn't been so busy, driving himself and those about him. There hadn't been time for anything but work. Freda had seemed so steady, so willing to do everything he expected, never demanding attentions he had no time to give. Then too, there were the children, the three oldest of them girls.

There was nothing he could do — nothing he could afford to do. He realized that he dared not rouse Freda. Now that she had done this, he didn't really know her. There was no telling what might happen, if she were thoroughly stirred. He could not risk losing her. He needed her, to take care of the house, cook the meals, look after the children, the chickens, the cows, the garden. He mustn't lose her now, when things were commencing to come his way. His ten years' pioneering was bearing fruit. He owned a thousand acres, homesteaded from the Government on his own rights and those of two drunken loafers for whom he had built shacks and bought whiskey and food during the required period of residence. At first it had been cattle, with alfalfa growing in the broad coulee, where there was a slight trickle of water. Then had come the bulletins on dry farming, from the Experiment Station. John Wenger prided himself on the hard Dutch wisdom which had made him see clearly what was coming. He let the other ranchers laugh at the idea of making crops grow on that arid bench, where even the grass turned brown in midsummer. While they complained about the railroad bringing in homesteaders to break up the range, John Wenger had read bulletins, and turned to wheat. He was making it pay. Now the homesteaders were arriving. There was someone on almost every half-section for ten miles in every direction. The prosperity for himself which John Wenger had foreseen had come with them. He alone, in that part of the country, had the things his new neighbors urgently needed — hay and grain for their horses, seed-wheat for their first planting, butter, eggs and vegetables for their tables. Even the boarders yielded a revenue. There had been at least one, sometimes three or four, steadily, since Spring — married men who had come on in advance of their families to throw up some sort of dwelling; or roving bachelors, like Lou Gooden. They

slept in the bunk-house, when there was room, or up in the barn, on the hay. He charged them stiff prices for the accommodation.

There mustn't be any trouble, either, with Lou Gooden. There was already hard feeling between the old-timers and these new farmers who were breaking up the range. John Wenger alone had been cordial to the homesteaders, making friends with them, selling them the things they needed, giving advice about sod-breaking, summer-fallowing, and planting. He knew the way things were going to go. Montana was changing. The new settlers would own it. For the next five years they would need things he had to sell — calves and colts and second-hand machinery. There would be bargains to be picked up later in land, equipment, and live-stock, from the weak-hearted who had given up and moved away. He was in with them now, and he meant to stay in. He would be the biggest of them all, if nothing happened. There mustn't be any trouble with Lou Gooden. He was already too popular with his stories, his smile, his twinkling eyes, and his knack of helpfulness.

John Wenger thought it all out, clearly, sanely, standing, squat and powerful, a little ludicrous in his short night-shirt, against the oblong of moonlight. Freda was too sensible to leave him and the comfortable ranch-house for the uncertainty of wandering over the country with Lou Gooden. There had only been this once. There might not be any more. Gooden had finished his shack. He was going into town tomorrow to bring out his supplies and start housekeeping. This was his last night in the barn. Tomorrow he would be living by himself, a mile away, across the open prairie. John Wenger could find out from the children, each night, without their suspecting anything, if their mother had been away during the day.

Something fluttered within the black square in the center of the barn. Freda Wenger stepped out into the

moonlight, picked her way between the hay-racks, and came swiftly back across the yard. Her husband shivered slightly in the chilly air, and slid softly back into bed. He lay quite still, breathing slowly, as he did in his sleep. From below came the squeak of the loose board in the stoop, then the low twang of the coiled spring which closed the screen door. He heard his wife cross the kitchen. She must have bumped into something in the darkness, for there was a faint rattle. She came up the stairs quietly, so as not to awaken the children. A chair creaked as she sat down to take off her shoes. Then she crept into bed beside him.

It was one thing, John Wenger found by morning, strong and sensible though he was, to tell himself that all women were weak that way, and quite another to realize that Freda, the patient, the hard-working, the maternal, was no better than the rest. He had been acutely, rebelliously conscious, as she lay by his side, of the warmth of her body, stealing across to him. Several times during the night he had had to fight against an impulse to get up, strike a light, and gaze into her face for whatever signs might still remain. But he was afraid she might wake out of the deep sleep into which she had quickly fallen. She had no right to sleep so quietly. He had not slept at all.

She arose in the morning while it was still dark. Breakfast was at five, and she needed an hour to build the fire and prepare the meal. Though he could not sleep, John Wenger stayed in his bed, as he usually did, until she called from the foot of the stairs, a half-hour later. He could not see her face when he clumped downstairs and across the kitchen, on his way to the chores. She was bending over the stove—a fine, strong, quiet woman, in a blue calico dress—frying potatoes. The children were still upstairs, sleeping.

He could see her face now, at breakfast, from his chair

at the head of the table. He watched her narrowly, as she moved about the low-ceiling room, pouring coffee, replenishing plates of bread, taking up more meat and potatoes from the skillets on the stove. But he could see nothing. There was no change in her manner. She moved as calmly, as capably as ever, from stove to table and from table to stove. There was no change, but as he watched her, he suddenly realized that he had not really looked at her for a long time. And he noted now, with a queer, disturbing sense of discovery, how well she held her fine figure, in spite of the heavy work and the four children, how firm and white her flesh was, at the neck, where it showed above the yoke of her calico dress, and how pleasantly her thick brown hair, moist with perspiration from the ruddy stove, curled in little ringlets about her forehead and above her ears. She had been, he remembered, a pretty girl — a happy, laughing girl, much sought after by the boys in the Pennsylvania farming community where he had courted her. No wonder Lou Gooden's eyes had brightened as he came into the kitchen for breakfast, calling out a cheerful "Mornin', folks." She had asked, quietly, "How are you feeling, Lou?" and had smiled at him. Lou had grinned back as he replied, "All right again, thank you."

The ranch-hands gulped the last of their coffee, took down their hats, and straggled out. John Wenger arose from the table, moved heavily toward the door. He wavered an instant by the stove, then turned toward his wife who was cooking a fresh breakfast for the children, and said, "Anything you want me to do for you, Freda, before I go into the field?"

She looked at him queerly. "Why, no, John," she said, "nothin' I can think of. I'll get along all right, same as usual."

He followed Lou Gooden out into the yard. "This is the day you want the bay team and the wagon, ain't it?" he said.

"Yep," replied Lou, "this is the day. Goin' in town and haul out my supplies. I'm an old bach, again now. Sorta hate to leave. It's been nice here, with the kids and all."

"Sorry to have you go," said John Wenger, shaking hands awkwardly. "You've made a lot of fun for the younguns and Freda. Needn't bring the team back until mornin' if you're late gettin' out from town. I'll only charge you for the day."

John Wenger went on out to the barn where the ranch hands were untying the horses. "Go ahead and hook up to two hay-racks," he said. "Want to see if I can find where that old frozen-foot hen has hid out her nest." He climbed up the ladder to the loft, moved across the hay, and stood, shivering slightly, gazing down at the untidy pile of horse-blankets where Lou Gooden had slept. From below came the rattle of trace chains, as the men led out the horses. "Wonder what's come over the old man," he heard one of the ranch-hands say, "lookin' after the chickens thataway. Generally makes the mis-sus take care of 'em." He turned, recrossed the hay, climbed down the ladder and walked out into the yard. "We'll haul from the south field today," he said, climbing onto one of the racks. "No use losin' any more time here. Get started."

There was plenty of time for thinking, while they were hauling hay. John Wenger always worked with his men, setting a hard pace, about which they grumbled, but with which they kept up, nevertheless. He was pitching from the stack, stabbing great forkfuls of the matted alfalfa, hoisting them, swinging them onto the rack, with a strong thrust of arms and shoulders. His muscles worked meechnically, while his mind wrestled with the thing that had happened to him last night.

He thought of his wife, as he had known her for fifteen years; moving with him and the two oldest child-

ren to this wild country; settling down, without fuss, in a flapping tent on the face of the prairie, while he dug a well and built a house; working with him on the barbed-wire fences; milking the cows; bearing him two more children, with no aid but his own, the nearest neighbor six miles away; carrying her share of the load and the lonesomeness, as a strong woman should, without protesting.

But mostly he thought of her now, not as the wife who slept at his side, nor even as the mother of his children, but as the girl whom he had courted and won, from a host of suitors, back in Pennsylvania. He found himself trying to remember what they had looked like, and how they had acted — these other admirers. And he found himself desperately trying to recall what he himself had done, how he had won her. He had been less of a man then than he was now, weaker in muscle, weaker in purpose, weaker in determination to make money — to get on. He *had* won her — snatched her right out from under the noses of those other young fellows, some of them better-looking than he — better-looking than Lou Gooden. She had come to him willingly. And they had never really quarreled. Once or twice, he remembered, she had asked him not to be so hard on his horses. And she had cried once, when he criticized her for being too soft-hearted. That had been a long time ago. She still stayed in the house when he and the ranch-hands were branding or dehorning. But she had accepted his principle that theirs was a hard life, with no time for sympathy or any other weakness. She, too, must be interested in their getting on — getting rich. It would mean a lot for the children.

Up on the load, under a blistering sun, Slim Wilkins, the ranch-hand, was striving desperately to place the hay which was coming up to him. He scraped the sweat from his forehead, with a crooked fore-finger, and called

down to his employer, "Hey, boss, take it easy a minute, will ya? Yer jest about coverin' me up. I never see a man pitch hay like you. Ya damn nigh stuck me in the leg with yer fork a coupla times. Musta et a big breakfast or slept well or somepin'."

Supper was finished. It had been a dull meal. Slim Wilkins, looking up once from his empty plate, and reaching down the table to stab a piece of bread, had said, "Wonder if Lou got out from town all right. Nice little feller. Sorta lonesome round here, without 'im." "'Tis that," replied one of the other ranch-hands. "He allus had plenty to talk about." "Lou was good company," said Freda Wenger slowly.

Now the ranch-hands had shuffled out to the bunk-house. Freda Wenger had finished putting the two younger children to bed, and was gathering up dishes from the long, oilcloth-covered table. The older girls were out at the corral, milking. John Wenger sat by the window, where there was still a little light, watching his wife over the edge of his farm paper. She moved tirelessly back and forth, from table to sink, from sink to table, as she had done every night of their lives in this house — a quiet, capable, patient woman, middle-aged, but somehow or other, in the twilight which filled the kitchen, still a girl, a pretty girl — desirable in another man's eyes — in his own.

She finished clearing the table. From a nail behind the stove, she took down the big dishpan, filled it with dishes, poured in hot water. John Wenger put down his paper, arose stiffly from his chair, and moved uncertainly toward the rack where the towels were drying. His wife looked up from her work when he was halfway across the floor. "What are you lookin' for, John?" she said. "Your tobacco? It's in the front room, on the stand. Better set down in there, in the easy chair. You look sorta tired out. Slim Wilkins said

you worked pretty hard today." He moved into the front room, lighted the lamp, and sat down. He *was* tired. Going without sleep that way sort of did a man up. He stared up at the colored picture. Funny how Freda still looked like that other woman, there in the picture, with a baby. She didn't want him to help her. It seemed almost as if she had known what he was going to do, and had said what she did about the tobacco to stop him. If Lou Gooden had been here tonight he would have helped her. They would have laughed and joked and had a good time. Lou was good company.

When the alarm clock went off the next morning, John Wenger was already out of bed, dressing. His wife reached out and turned off the whirring mechanism, then sat up and looked with surprise at the lighted lamp and her husband, who was sitting on a chair, drawing on his shoes. "Why, John," she said, "what's the matter? It ain't time for you to get up yet." John Wenger was confused. "I woke up early," he said, doggedly; "thought I might as well go down and build the fire. You can take another nap for a quarter of an hour, if you want. I'll call you when the fire gets goin'."

"You might as well let me do it," she said nervously; "you don't know how. I couldn't go back to sleep anyhow. You just go on down and do your chores."

"Won't do me no harm to learn," he replied, and clumped down the stairs. He had both hands full of kindling, and was ramming it into the stove, on top of wadded paper, when she joined him hurriedly, a few minutes later. She pushed him gently away. "Now, you let me do that, John," she said. "You go on out and do your chores."

They brought John Wenger into the kitchen late that afternoon, with his face white and set, and his left hand a shredded mass of dripping crimson. Freda Wenger met them at the door. "Got his paw caught

in the fannin' mill, ma'am," said Slim Wilkins, impressively, motioning toward her husband's mangled fingers. "We was acleaning seed-wheat. Damn nigh chawed his hand off afore I could stop the engine. Guess I better ride in town for a doctor."

Freda Wenger helped her husband into a chair, fastened a napkin around his wrist, and twisted it tight with the handle of a potato-masher. Then she poured warm water into a basin, and hunted around on the shelf, until she found the bottle of Pain-Killer they used for tooth-ache. She poured it all into the water and washed his hand gently. "Mebbe that'll help a little, John," she said, "until the doctor comes."

"I don't see how I come to be so careless," her husband mumbled, through set lips. "I musta been thinkin' about somethin' else. Guess I'll lose two, three fingers. Lucky it's the left hand."

"I'm awfully sorry," she said; "must hurt pretty bad, don't it?" She reached down timidly, and patted his head.

John Wenger looked up slowly. She was standing there, gazing down at him with that same funny look in her eyes. He reached out gropingly and took her hand. "When you stand there—like that," he said, "you look—just like the Madonna—in the colored picture—over the organ."

She gave a queer, embarrassed little laugh, the blood mounting swiftly to her temples. "Why, John," she said, "just listen to you talk. You're as bad as Lou Gooden."

"Lou Gooden?" said John Wenger dully, through lips rigid with pain. "What did Lou Gooden say?"

His wife flushed again. "I'm sorta 'shamed to tell you, though I guess you won't blame me much now. Night before last he was real sick, even though he made like he wasn't when we was doin' the dishes. I wanted

to give him some medicine before he went to bed, but I thought when I saw you lookin' at me you might not like it. I got to thinkin' 'bout him while I was undressin', all alone out there in the barn, feelin' real sick. So I said the chicken-house door was open and went down and carried him some medicine. While I was givin' it to him he looked up, same as you did now. Then he said, 'Ma Wenger, you're jest like that picture of the woman with the baby, hangin' over the organ — with that moonlight shinin' in at the window it looks like they was a halo 'round your head.' "

Freda Wenger stood at the bed-room window a month later, peering out into the moon-lit yard. "Well, I declare," she said, "I've gone and fergot to shut that door again."

"Why didn't you think of it before you got into your night clothes?" said John Wenger sleepily, from his bed. "You'll have to put something on and go down and 'tend to it, or the coyotes'll git all your Plymouth Rocks."

SIX POEMS

By JAMES HEARST

THE EXPERIMENT

You came and found me when the stars were blowing
Like strewn petals flowering in the dark.
And throbbed against me in surrender, knowing,
You only came to strike from me a spark.

The spark was struck and you were once more glowing.
You laughed and left me here where all is still
Save for the sound roots make when they are growing
And the rush of grasses on a windy hill.

IN APRIL

This I saw on an April day:
Warm rain spilt from a sun-lined cloud,
A sky-flung wave of gold at evening,
And a cock-pheasant treading a dusty path
Shy and proud.

And this I found in an April field:
A new white calf in the sun at noon,
A flash of blue in a cool moss bank,
And tips of tulips promising flowers
To a blue-winged loon.

And this I tried to understand
As I scrubbed the rust from my brightening plow:
The movement of seed in furrowed earth,
And a blackbird whistling sweet and clear
From a green-sprayed bough.

THE BURDEN

Apple bloom spread on the orchard floor,
Swept from the trees by the broom of the wind,
Bows down the tips of startled grass —
Grasses too young to have sinned.

And they must be for a little while
Content with the bloom of a foreign flower.
As a weight of love or gift from the wind,
It will fade and drift in an hour.

Then with a wave of running green
They'll swiftly wash the orchard floor,
And taunt blind roots on long hot days
With the pale pink bloom they bore.

THE CONTRACT

You may have my garden if you will give to me
The first pink blossom from its wild apple tree.
You may have the harvest and you may have the toil
If you will let me stretch in the black warm soil.

And all that I can say to you or you can say to me
Is, see how wide the sky is now that I am free
To cultivate my garden or investigate my soul;
Then you may play the gardener and I will play the troll.

And when you're gnarled and broken this of you I'll tell:
He had the best melons ever raised to sell.
When I am ripe and sleepy you must speak of me
As smooth, bitter fruit from a wild-apple tree.

FIRST SNOW

The road and yard are full of dust
That sifted from a cloud last night,
And I've come out because I must
Review a brown world changed to white.
And lest I fail to understand
The change that lies before my eyes,
I tramp about upon my land
Examining each white surprise.
And I make new acquaintances
Where I had left old friends before—
I shake the pump's snow-coated arm
And knock upon my own back door.

FRAGMENT

By THOMAS MURTHA

Susie went across the five-foot square hall into the front room of the attic-flat, and lit the gas under the kettle. The gas-plate stood upon a cupboard alongside a neat stack of tin-ware. The tube carrying the gas was arched up the wall to a socket. Susie had tacked a square of white oil-cloth on the papered wall behind the plate to keep it from getting splashed with grease.

She laid two places on the table and cut bread and got a ketchup bottle from the cupboard under the gas-plate. The bottle was three-quarters empty. She said, "I must get another bottle. It's good. Perce likes it."

Susie was twenty. She was slight of body, and had fair hair that was bobbed and hung very straight. It had not been cut for some time and was getting long again. Susie's nose was not too long, nor did her chin recede like Percy's. She had no buckteeth like he had. Her eyes were faded, they were that light in color. She was wearing a thin over-all white apron, that left her neck showing, so that one could see the outlines of the bones there.

She pulled a rocker over to the wall-register by the gas-plate and sat there, under the light, waiting for the kettle to boil, and for Perce to come. He got home usually at half-past five. He quit calling at houses at five. He said people didn't want to be bothered by being asked to see sewing-baskets after that hour. It wouldn't be doing justice to his work.

Perce knew a thing or two, all right. Many canvassers would keep on calling at doors through the supper-hour. Perce was a good salesman and knew better. There hadn't been a day for the past three weeks that he had been working for the Victoria House-Utensil

Company but he had sold over twelve sewing-baskets. And he got twenty-five cents on every basket. He was doing all right. If he hadn't been let go at the restaurant he would still be getting a lousy fifteen a week. A good thing it was after all that the old boss had had a nephew wanting to get into the business. Else Perce would still be there. And they would be living in that single room on Bleeker street, doing all, eating and sleeping, in that one room, on the same floor as Mr. Reid, the whiskered old bill-collector, who came in drunk.

Susie jumped and stood by the stove with a dish-cloth in her hands when she heard Percy coming. She knew his step on the stairs. He coughed on the last flight as usual, to let her know who it was.

The customary mumbled greeting passed, and he went into the bedroom to take off his coat and cap. Susie heard him fumbling with the light, the clatter as he threw down the sample basket, and the rustling of his clothes. He had a paper too. She could hear it. He came back to the kitchen, blowing his nose, and with the paper tucked under one arm. Susie said, trying to be nice, "Well, how did you do to-day?"

"Fourteen," he said simply, stuffing the handkerchief into his hip-pocket, and shaking out the paper.

Susie emptied a bowl of potatoes in the frying-pan, and cut three sausages in small pieces through the potatoes. They liked fried potatoes. Susie had saved these from the day before. They would go good with ketchup.

"Any news?" she asked.

"Oh, nothing much. Getting cold out. I think it will snow."

"Huh?"

"I say it's getting cold. I think it will snow."

"That so? Say, wasn't it snowing heavy last night when Bill and Ethel were leaving here?" Susie had a whisper of a voice.

"Uh-huh. I was wishing they had left earlier. I could have gone to bed."

"So could I. I was so sleepy I could have dropped. I nearly died. I never even heard you getting out this morning."

Perce sat in the rocking-chair and opened the paper wide. He read the comics. Susie leaned over his shoulder, and said, "What's Jiggs doing to-night?" She started reading in her slow way, when he let the paper fall, and stood up saying, "Let's eat, Suse. I'm damned hungry."

Suse put the potatoes on the pie-tin on the table, and poured the tea.

Percy had fair, straight hair, parted in the middle. It flopped across his forehead on either side. He sat stooped, his pointed face near the plate. He talked very little, as was his habit. Suse never bothered him much then because she knew he didn't like it. Besides he was tired, and it wasn't right to bother him. She must help him. They ought to pull together, since they were living together. Suse thought of Mrs. Webber up in Rosedale whom she used to work for, and of her teaching her to look at things like that. Percy and she would always be together. No one else should count as much as Perce. It was queer when she thought of it, and it made her look at Perce more closely.

"Want some tea?"

"All right," he said, mopping his plate with a slice of white bread. Then he sipped his tea, elbows on the table.

"Do you want a cake?" she asked.

"Well, — all right. Gee, I wish we had a pie."

"Let's hope we will some day soon."

"Huh?"

Suse gave a little laugh, and said, "When you're a real traveller, out on the road."

Perce said, "We'll get one Saturday night."

"You'd do all right on the other, though."

"Say, didn't Ethel look swell last night?"

"Yes, didn't she? With her hair curled. She had just had it cut."

"It wasn't that, was it?" Perce said.

"Sure."

"I thought she looked brighter than usual."

"She thinks I ought to get mine done."

Perce fell silent, and Suse got afraid. Perce didn't like her to get her hair done at all. He was so queer that way. She was sorry she had mentioned it. It was going to be hard to get hers done, Perce kept the change so well. She was thinking a lot about it lately. She would tell him to leave some money in the morning for bread and soap and things. She would get some change.

She didn't ask about it till she was slipping into bed. He had gone earlier and lay doubled up, making a loud noise breathing so hard. She stretched along under the cool sheets and lay back relaxing. "Perce,— Perce," she called.

The breathing stopped and he raised his head. "What is it?"

"When you're going out in the morning, leave some change. I must get some things."

"Well." Then after a time he said, "What do you want?"

"There are no potatoes. And I must get some bread and some ketchup. You like that ketchup."

Perce said nothing. Her face sank in the soft pillow. She thought what a time they would have when he had a good job. They would have a flat. Or no. An apartment. With an electric stove where she could really make things. Make many things. She began to imagine the many things. Then she was asleep.

Perce left a two-dollar bill in the morning. Suse kept

fifteen cents of the change. She was afraid to keep more for fear he would miss it.

Perce wanted new underwear, and a warmer cap, but these could not be got for a while. She felt guilty about the fifteen cents. But she kept three nickels in her stocking. She was afraid he would find them. Suppose she had an accident. Burned her foot with hot water from the kettle, and he would pull off the stocking. It frightened her to think of what he would do.

Bill and Ethel came over one night a week, and they played "seven-up" with matches. They would have a lunch afterwards — soda-biscuits, and cheese, and coffee. Perce enjoyed those nights. He said it did a fellow good after a week's grind ringing bells. A fellow needed company, a good lively party. They did have good fun, Suse thought. And Mrs. Heenan downstairs didn't mind the fun, so long as they didn't go to bed and forget to turn out the lights. She was a good soul, and Suse didn't like to offend her. She was giving Perce the rooms cheap at seventeen dollars a month. She had provided most of the furniture too, the table and the cupboard, and the chairs; Perce had done well with her. Suse felt bound to help him, and apart from the nickels, she got a thrill from it. She loved Perce. She looked forward to the nights when Bill and Ethel came, just because of the good it would do Perce.

She had fifty-five cents in two weeks. She kept it now in a handkerchief in the lining of her overcoat, slipping it in there through a hole in her pocket. Perce had not missed it. But she waited till near Christmas to get her hair done, as it was only another two weeks, and besides Perce wouldn't mind it so much then.

Perce sold a lot of baskets that last week. He made twenty-four dollars and seventy-five cents. That was a dandy week. They were able to buy little things for each other, and for Bill and Ethel. Perce gave Suse a

two-dollar bill to buy things, and she took the chance to get her hair trimmed. It dumfounded Perce. He said, "Didn't you buy anything?"

She got confidential, and told about the nickels. He didn't say anything. But he wouldn't say she looked fine. He was a little bit stubborn, she thought. She knew he liked it by the way he looked. But he didn't say one nasty thing. Perce was all right after all. She knew they could get along together.

Perce spent a lot of money for Christmas dinner, and they had Bill and Ethel over. Suse had not seen him so happy since they were married. He was a little devil, she told Ethel. They had a good day.

Perce couldn't sell any more sewing-baskets after Christmas, and he quit the Victoria House-Utensil Company, and started with another place that enlarged photographs. He had to lug around a big suit-case that was his sample-case. He made a dollar and fifteen cents in two days. He said then he would quit and try to land a real job. He went out to the west end of the city to a rubber factory where he knew a foreman, and was told to come back in ten days. Perce said to Suse, "I think it sounds all right. I won't take any more of those canvassing jobs. I'm sick of those damn dirty jobs. Sick of them."

Suse didn't know what to say except that it would be fine if he could get a steady job.

Perce went down-town one morning without telling her why. She didn't think much about it till a car came in the afternoon when she was alone. She heard the man down in the hall say to Mrs. Heenan, "Mr. Percy Bone, it is." Mrs. Heenan said, "I don't think Mr. is in, But Mrs. Bone is."

He came upstairs, grunting on the steps. He was burly, of middle age, and carried a derby hat. He said, "Mrs. Percy Bone? I'm from the Relief Office." Suse

didn't know what to say. She had to answer a lot of questions about how they were getting along, and the man made notes with a nice pen in a small loose-leaf book, of which he seemed very proud. He went away without saying more than a "Good-day."

When Perce came he said he had been down to the Office all right. He said the devils couldn't let people starve. They'd a right to split up some of their dough. He'd given them a pretty good story.

Suse went about getting the supper of fried potatoes and sausages without talking. She didn't know what to think.

A basket of groceries came the next morning. Susie said, "Oh, Perce, don't you have to pay at all?"

"Not a bit."

Susie wondered. Perce was a good manager all right. She would save all she could.

Perce stayed in bed most of the afternoon. It snowed, and a hard wind sounded against the storm-window in the bedroom. The sun shone only at times. People in the street kept their collars up. Suse sat at the window reading old magazines that she knew almost by heart. When she saw a lot of people going towards the park with skates, she wished she were one of the girls in sweaters and knickers.

At five Perce got up and went downstairs to 'phone and Suse listening at the bannister, heard him call up Bill, and ask him to come over after supper, and bring Ethel. She was glad. When Perce came up he told her to get a good lunch ready now that there was lots of grub.

They played cards and had a big lunch. Bill and Ethel didn't leave till one o'clock. They said they had never enjoyed such a lunch.

Perce took a rest every day by not getting up till noon. When he went to see the foreman at the rubber factory, he was told to come back in about seven days, because

there was a chance there would be something doing then. Perce was quite down about it, and told Suse he had only a couple of dollars. It frightened her. They ate dinner without talking. Perce went into the bedroom without speaking, and when she peeked later, he was in bed asleep. She felt sorry. He had such a lot to think about.

With the few dishes washed, and the place straightened up, Susie grew restless. She wanted to get out. In a flash she thought of Mrs. Webber, and she thought how fine it would be if she could make a few dollars there. She got on her coat and hat and rubbers, and tip-toed out, so as not to awake Perce.

Mrs. Webber was glad to see her, and looked sorry at hearing of trouble. She blamed Suse for not coming back to see her at times, and tell her how things were going. She said she could keep Susie busy for a couple of days a week. "I wish you'd never left me," she said then, and that embarrassed Suse.

"You would have done better to stay with me," Mrs. Webber added, and smiled. It made Suse feel childish. She thought about it on the way home, and of how it was plain that Mrs. Webber didn't look on Perce like she herself did. It was strange to think how few people really knew Perce as she did.

Suse got two dollars from Mrs. Webber the next day. She got a lunch too. She wondered most of the time how Perce was getting along. She was quite happy at being able to get little things for supper on the way home.

Perce didn't ask her for the change. He was going about in his slippers. He needed the rest, anyway.

Suse didn't rest till she got something to do on the other days of the week. And it was Mrs. Webber who got her the work of selling two-dollar knife-sharpeners. She 'phoned all her friends to buy one, and Suse sold six on the first day. She made a dollar on each one.

Perce told her when she got home that Mrs. Heenan had asked for the weekly rent and that he had had to go down to the Relief Office to get it. They could be a cubby bunch down there when they felt like it.

Suse said, "Mrs. Heenan wasn't sore, was she?"

"Oh, no. I'm going down after supper to give it to her."

Suse leaned over the bannister when he went down. She heard Mrs. Heenan thank him, and say she was like other people, that she had bills to pay.

Perce said, "You don't know where a fellow could get a job, do you?"

Suse stopped breathing. Perhaps Mrs. Heenan knew.

Mrs. Heenan said, "Well, you're out oftener than I am. I haven't the faintest idea."

"You know," Perce went on, "I'm kind of promised a job out in the west end at the Gutta Percha works. But I'd like to make some money in the meanwhile."

"You think you will be starting out there then?"

"Well, yes."

"Is it very far? Will you be able to go from here?"

Perce said with a chuckle, "Well, hardly; it's about an hour on the street-car."

Perce was laughing when he came up. "I thought I'd establish a little bit of credit."

"She didn't know of anything?"

"No, she didn't. Gee, I wish she did."

Suse made fourteen dollars in the next week. But Perce went down one afternoon to the Relief Office and got some more rent-money. He was looking better than he had been for some time. The rest in the mornings was doing it. Suse giggled when he would say he had slept till noon. "You're a sleepyhead," she said.

Bill came over one night with two tickets for a dance. Suse said to herself that she was never so glad, because Perce could enjoy himself. The four of them went, and did not get home till after two o'clock.

Perce went after more rent the next morning. Suse was home that evening before he took it down-stairs. He came up very red. Susie got scared. "What's the matter, Perce?"

"She gave me a week's notice, the old devil."

Suse looked amazed.

"Tried to give me the devil for not working. Said I shouldn't be letting you go out to work."

"Oh, Perce, did she say that?"

"I couldn't say much. I was just going to tell her to go to hell when that son of hers came in. You know him. That big devil."

Suse felt her eyes fill.

She woke the next morning with a headache. Perce had gone out early. She went down to 'phone Mrs. Webber that she wasn't feeling well, and wouldn't be up. Mrs. Heenan came in from the kitchen. Suse hurried to get back upstairs, but the woman called her, and Suse leaned over the bannister, her face hot and eyes dim.

Mrs. Heenan gave Perce an awful rating. Suse nodded when the woman asked if her headache didn't come from working. She detested Mr. Bone for lying up in the mornings. They talked for nearly half an hour. Suse cried some, and got confidential because of Mrs. Heenan acting so motherly, and said she wished at times that she had never married, that she would rather be at Webber's, where there was a good home. But Perce wanted to get married. Susie shrugged her shoulders, she felt so guiltless of the trouble.

She wasn't talking to Mrs. Heenan again, because she was working nearly every day. Perce stayed at the flat, packing up. Susie was afraid to tell Mrs. Webber about moving for fear she would want her to leave Perce and go back to stay with her. She was afraid of Mrs. Webber's ability to talk. As things were, there was nothing

for it but to move off without mentioning it at all. Susie felt guilty about it. She liked Mrs. Webber.

They moved from the flat on a dull frosty day. Bill had got an old Ford to cart the things for them. They were going down to a room on Queen street, over a fruit-store. Suse hadn't seen it. She waited in the flat till the last bit of furniture was moved. Bill and Percy came for her in the car. And she went down to the street, carrying a picture, and a cupid-doll electric lamp, that she had for the dresser.

Mrs. Heenan's son opened the door for Percy and Bill to carry out the box of dishes. He didn't say anything. Suse knew he was sore over Perce talking to his mother, and was afraid he would say something nasty. She didn't see Mrs. Heenan at all, and she was glad, for she felt that if she had, she would have been obliged to leave their new address. And that would have made Perce sore. But there was nobody around except the son. She knew his name was Jack. He was good-looking. He had a good job, somewhere. She didn't speak to him though. She walked ahead of Perce and Bill out to the old Ford, thinking how cold it would be with no top on the car.

BRIEF REVIEWS

More "In American," by JOHN V. A. WEAVER. (Knopf, \$1.50). The three tales in verse which Mr. Weaver has included in this charmingly-made little book are unquestionably effective. Their effectiveness comes, to be sure, not so much from poetry as from the excellent handling which Mr. Weaver has given the important themes with which he has dealt, and from the fine convincingness of the language his characters use. In other words, the qualities of these three poems are those of good short stories. But that is nothing against them, and if Mr. Weaver can achieve (as I suspect he is doing) a somewhat distinctive art form by such methods, I have nothing but commendation for such an attempt.

Besides the three poems I have been discussing, there are a number of shorter pieces in this volume, and perhaps some may prefer them. Most of them are written in the "American" which has made their author a notable figure. Mr. Weaver does somewhat the same thing with language in his verse that Mr. Ring Lardner does with it in his more serious stories. I take a few lines from the first poem in this book:

So Pa yells out, "Why ain't the dinner done yet?"

And Ma says, "They was a fire down the block,

And fourteen fire-engines. It was excitin'!"

And Pa yells louder, "Oh, for the love of God!

Ain't you got nothin' to do but be a leaner?

That's what the whole bunch of you are — just leaners."

He said a whole lot more, and so did Ma.

He's always naggin' her about bein' a leaner.

F. L. M.

The Harper Prize Short Stories, (Harper, \$2.00). This pleasant volume contains the twelve short stories which won prizes in the contest conducted by *Harper's Magazine* last year. They are all good workmanlike tales, of the sort that are not uncommon in our better magazines, and they are chiefly by regular Harper writers. But there is one outstanding piece of work: it is Miss Alice Brown's "The Girl in the Tree." Miss Brown is now nearly seventy (if my Manly and Rickert is correct, and it usually is) and here she writes what seems to me to be the best story of her career — a very modern, effective, significant tale. The Harper contest would have been worth while if only to point attention to "The Girl in the Tree." I should like to mention also Conrad Aiken's "The Wanderer."

which had already been republished in his *Bring! Bring!* and the two stories by a good though somewhat conventional craftsman in short fiction, Charles Caldwell Dobie. Ada Jack Carver seems to be the chief discovery of the contest, but her story does not appeal to me as being very important.

F. L. M.

The Writing of Fiction by EDITH WHARTON. (Scribner, \$2). When a novelist of rank as high as that of Mrs. Wharton writes of her art she is worthy the closest attention. She begins with a chapter called "In General" in which she insists upon the importance of mental background, and of form and style; she then gives a chapter to the short story and one to the construction of novels, closing with some observations on the relation of character to situation. A chapter on Marcel Proust is a kind of postscript. The little book has more of practical suggestions, more of text-book category than I expected. It is a definitely valuable addition to the all too small literature by artists about their art.

F. L. M.

Wide Pastures, by MARIE EMILIE GILCHRIST. (Macmillan, \$1.25). I am very glad to have this volume of the poems of Miss Gilchrist. It is one of the few volumes of contemporary poetry which will not merely have a place on my shelves, but which I shall take down from time to time because of my desire to renew my pleasure in the reading of a certain poem. This is true because the book ministers richly to a personal craving of mine for vivid and authentic rendering of the emotions of experiences of the earth. In such poems as "The Highlands — In October," "Winter Woods," "Summer," there is very lovely expression of a deep response to the varied beauty of the earth. These poems are not primarily mystical, and that is one of my reasons for liking them as I do: the objective sensuous experience of hills and trees and sky is enough, or nearly so.

The volume contains also some genuine lyrics of quite other tone, and some penetrating and memorable glimpses of character. Altogether, it is a truly fine book.

J. T. F.

Black Valley, by RAYMOND WEAVER. (The Viking Press, \$2.00). This novel has some very definite virtues, and deserves wide reading. It assembles a vital and absorbing group of characters: Alurid Wilberforce, the American missionary in Japan; his wife; his son, Gilson; Gilson's Japanese sweetheart, O-Yo-Ake-San; Gilson's friend, Mrs. West; and the "missionary ladies." Some of these characters are imperfectly realized. Gilson is rather incredibly juvenile at times, while his Mrs. West is a little too much the *dea ex machina* who sets all in order at the end of the book. The Japanese girl is handled rather timidly, as it seems to me, and scarcely attains convincing personality. Her benefactress, the "missionary lady" Jochebed, is presented ambiguously. But on the other hand the emotional travail of Frances Penslow, the missionary of fifty who has decided to marry a sea captain and is disappointed by him, is handled in masterly fashion.

The Japanese background is excellent so far as it goes, but it does not permeate the book as it might well have done. It is brilliantly presented again and again; but it is not woven into the whole texture of the narrative consistently and inevitably.

One of the most admirable aspects of this book is its handling of such of its material as involves the relation of the sexes. The writer has placed before us the Japanese and American ideas of marriage, and of sex relations generally, in vivid and intelligible contrast. He has done this without sacrificing either frankness or taste, writing with boldness where boldness is due, and with reticence where reticence is admirable.

One is constrained to wonder whether Raymond Weaver has told his one story in this remarkable book, or can go on adequately from this fine beginning. In any case, *Black Valley* is an absorbing and valuable novel.

J. T. F.

No More Parades, by FORD MADOX FORD. (A. and C. Boni, \$2.50). The reader who knows Ford Madox Ford only through his fine volume, *Joseph Conrad*, as I confess that I did before reading *No More Parades*, will nevertheless have been amply prepared for the strength, the sincerity joined with great brilliancy, which characterize this novel. In fact, the method of the novelist here, in presenting the character of Captain Tietjens and the theme implied in the title, is surprisingly like that

of the biographer in the Conrad volume. Approaching from many different angles, spontaneously and almost tentatively, he yet creates a central impression that is amazingly sharp in outline and solid in meaning. Reflection convinces one that the seemingly careless and almost chaotic structure of the book is a matter of the most rigorous design. *No More Parades* is a novel which would delight for the craftsmanship it displays if it had no further claim upon our attention. But such a claim it has. As a profound and honest and sympathetic study of a man of a fixed ideal in a world of flux and change — of the last Tory, as Ford rather smilingly calls him — the book makes a real contribution to serious thinking. I am glad that I have read it.

J. T. F.

Toward the Flame, by HERVEY ALLEN. (Doran, \$2.00). This narrative, with "no plot, no climax, and no happy ending," is the lucid and intermittently exciting account of one man's experiences in the World War. The notebook formlessness which bars *Toward the Flame* from a place among the great war novels lends it, however, an undeniable authenticity.

Primarily a poet, Allen here essays to hold closely to the line of his story. The fact remains that the book's most memorable passages are genuinely tender and lyrical expressions of the beauty and mystery of life in the arms of death, hideousness walking with valor, and poignantly lovely French villages in white, misty moonlight close beside black, menacing woods.

C. B. N.

Of Love, and Other Trifles, by N. BRYLLION FAGIN. (The Ross-Bryn Company). Here is a slender book made up of very short stories by the author of the brilliant treatise, *Short Story Writing, An Art or a Trade?* The little book gives abundant evidence that Mr. Fagin is himself a master of the art which he has discussed, in expository fashion, in his earlier book. The very narrow limits of the present stories demand much of the writer if he is to make any noteworthy impression. That he does impress us, notably and repeatedly, is his triumph. Yet I do not feel that this volume really does justice to Mr. Fagin's creative ability, and I look forward to another volume made up of longer stories.

J. T. F.

The Emigrants, by JOHAN BOJER. (Century, \$2.00). Here at last justice is done the Hyphen. For so long and with such virulence have we been taught to hate what has been called "hyphenated Americanism" that we have quite lost sight of the human elements that must always enter into the emigration of families from one country to another. In Johan Bojer's latest novel we at last see the hearts of emigrants with sympathy and understanding.

Johan Bojer is a novelist of the first class, and of course when he came to deal with a subject of implications so large, he was sure to produce a big novel. *The Emigrants* describes the condition of six families in one Norwegian neighborhood, tells of their leaving the old country, and of their coming to North Dakota about 1880, and then describes their experiences on the prairie with blizzards and prairie fires and droughts, and finally with prosperity, improvements, and modern conditions. But all the time there is the interplay with conditions at the old home in Norway. "If you came back you wanted to leave again; if you went away you longed to come back. Wherever you were you could hear the call of the homeland, like the note of a herdsman's horn far away in the hills. You had one home out there, and one over here, and yet you were an alien in both places. Your true abiding place was the vision of something very far away."

The story of the Skaret family is the most effective of all the treatments of groups in the story, and it may be that this would have been a better book if the author had kept chiefly to the Skarets and not scattered his fire so much. Or, on the other hand, if he wanted the several groups in order to build up an almost epical portrayal, then a novel of much greater length would have been necessary in order to do justice to the task. The condensation of his big conception is noticeable in many of the incidents: the prairie fire, the blizzard, even the farming operations, are none of them treated with entire adequacy; and besides, they are piled on top of one another without sufficient sense of the lapse of time. Probably the author could not have done the bigger work without staying in this country longer than he did and making more thorough studies; but how it would have been worth doing! A great masterpiece! And Johan Bojer would have been the man to do it.

Well, the opportunity for the greater work was lost. We are grateful for what we have — a good and moving novel of the Norwegian-Americans.

F. L. M.

Lonesome Road, by PAUL GREEN. (McBride, \$2.00). Recent interest in the serious treatment of the negro in American literature has found, in some respects, its most adequate expression in drama. These "six plays for the negro theatre," by Paul Green, a young instructor at the University of North Carolina, are well-written, dramatically effective, and thoroughly artistic productions, worthy of comparison with the work of Ridgeley Torrence and Eugene O'Neill. Like O'Neill, Mr. Green makes use of the strongly emotional, superstitious and religious imagination of the negro. But greater emphasis is placed upon the character-tragedy of the negro who has within him white blood, who struggles to become educated and "be somebody." This conflict forms the major theme of three of the best plays: "*In Abraham's Bosom*," "*White Dresses*," and "*The End of the Row*." The path of the aspiring negro is indeed a "lonesome road", and, in his sympathy for those who travel it, Mr. Green has proven himself an able artist of folk drama.

R. L.

The Best French Short Stories of 1924-25, edited by RICHARD EATON. (Small, Maynard, \$2.50). This is the second of the French series of the Small, Maynard short story anthologies, but the first which I have seen. I confess that this volume is a disappointment to me. The stories are not, as a rule, very readable, and they give a painful feeling of artificiality. Paul Morand's "I Burn Moscow" is amusing, at least. Mr. Eaton in his introduction says that he has given some weight to the conformity of these stories "to the principles of the American short story," whatever they are. I think that is indefensible.

F. L. M.

BIOGRAPHICAL

JAMES HEARST is a young writer of Cedar Falls, Iowa, who divides his time between writing and farming.

HARRY G. HUSE's story "The Old Trail" in *THE MIDLAND* for last May will be recalled by our readers. Mr. Huse is now living West Redding, Conn.

THOMAS MURTHA's home is in Toronto, Canada. He is a graduate of the University of Toronto. "Fragment" is his first published story.

